

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 NEAE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 NSAE-00
NSCE-00 SSO-00 ICAC-00 INRE-00 SSM-03 PM-05 H-01
INR-10 L-03 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 (ISO) W
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TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 5745
INFO AMEMBASSY CAIRO PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY DAASCUS PRIORITY
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY JIDDA PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L AMMAN 3356

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, JO
SUBJECT: NATIONAL CONSULTATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR JORDAN

SUMMARY: COURT CHIEF SHARAF CALLED IN AMBASSADOR EVENING APRIL 12 AND INFORMED HIM THAT TOMORROW KING WOULD SEND LETTER TO PRIME MINISTER BADRAN CALLING FOR LEGISLATION ESTABLISHING A JORDANIAN NATIONAL CONSULTATIVE ASSEMBLY. BODY WOULD ACT AND OPERATE LIKE NOW DISSOLVED LOWER HOUSE OF PARLIAMENT IN ALL RESPECTS WITH EXCEPTION THAT ITS ADVICE WOULD NOT BE MANDATORY. IT WOULD CONSIDER LEGISLATION AND POLICY AND BE APPOINTED BY GOVERNMENT AND KING. SHARAF MADE CLEAR THAT IT IS TO BE FIRST STAGE IN A TRANSITION, IF IT WORKS, TO ELECTIONS IN JORDAN.
END SUMMARY.

1. SHARAF EXPLAINED THAT KING HAD BEEN GIVING CONSIDERABLE THOUGHT TO BROADENING THE BASE OF GOVERNMENT AND FILLING THE GAP NOW LEFT BY THE DISSOLVED LOWER HOUSE OF PARLIAMENT. SENATE CONTINUES IN EFFECT BUT DOES NOTHING IN ACDDTQ OF LOWER HOUSE AND IN VIEW OF EXISTENCE OF PRESENT SYSTEM OF HAVING CABINET ENACT
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LEGISLATION UNDER MARTIAL LAW DECREE. UNDER NEW PROPOSAL ADVISORY BODY TO GOVERNMENT WOULD BE APPOINTED, SENATE WOULD CONTINUE IN EFFECT BUT MORIBUND, AND NEW BODY WOULD BE SEEN AS A PRECURSOR TO ELECTIONS FOR LOWER HOUSE OF PARLIAMENT IN SEVERAL (SHARAF MENTIONED TWO) YEARS.

2. NEW BODY AS PRESENTLY BEING CONSIDERED WOULD BE ESTABLISHED

BY LEGISLATION TO BE CALLED FOR BY KING TOMORROW (APRIL 13) IN LETTER TO PRIME MINISTER. MOST OF THE LEGISLATION IS DRAFTED AND LISTS OF APPOINTEES ARE BEING DISCUSSED. SHARAF EXPECTS LEGISLATION TO BE ACCEPTED BY THE CABINET WITHIN THE NEXT TWO WEEKS AFTER WHICH APPOINTMENTS WOULD BE MADE AND THE BODY MEET ACCORDING TO A TIME SCHEDULE IN THE LAW. BODY COULD NOT ACTUALLY ENACT LEGISLATION, SHARAF SAID, SINCE CONSTITUTION DOES NOT PERMIT NON-ELECTED BODY TO DO SO, ALTHOUGH UNDER MARTIAL LAW ADMINISTRATION PRESENTLY IN EFFECT, CABINET CAN ENACT TEMPORARY LAWS. BODY WOULD BE MADE UP OF 60 MEMBERS (SIZE OF PRESENTLY-DISSOLVED LOWER HOUSE), APPOINTED ON RECOMMENDATION BY THE PRIME MINISTER AND CABINET AND APPROVED BY THE KING.

3. BODY WOULD DEBATE ALL LEGISLATION AND COULD GIVE ITS ADVICE TO THE GOVERNMENT. IN FACT SHARAF SAID IT WOULD BE HARD FOR THE GOVERNMENT TO AVOID ACCEPTING THE ADVICE TENDERED. BODY COULD ALSO DEBATE POLICY AND OTHER DEVELOPMENTS ON REQUEST OF THE GOVERNMENT OR AT THE REQUEST OF A FIXED NUMBER OF ITS MEMBERS. MEMBERS, LIKE PRESENT PARLIAMENT, CANNOT BE CIVIL SERVANTS OR MILITARY. IN EFFECT, PREDOMINANT NUMBER WOULD BE EAST BANKERS ALTHOUGH EFFORTS WOULD BE MADE TO INCLUDE A NUMBER OF PEOPLE RESIDENT ON THE EAST BANK OF PALESTINIAN (WEST BANK) ORIGIN. MEMBERS WOULD BE CHOSEN WITH AN EYE TO HAVING THEM REPRESENT CONSTITUENCIES, ALTHOUGH IT IS NOT CLEAR WHETHER THESE WOULD BE PURELY GEOGRAPHICAL CONSTITUENCIES OR COVER INTEREST AND MINORITY GROUPS AS WELL -- I.E. PROFESSIONALS, CHRISTIANS, CONFIDENTIAL

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CICASSIANS AS WELL AS PALESTINIANS. SOME MEMBERS OF DISSOLVED PARLIAMENT MIGHT BE INCLUDED AS WELL AS SOME SENATORS, BUT MAJOR THRUST WOULD BE TO TRY TO FIND AND DEVELOP NEW, YOUNGER LEADERS.

4. PRIME MINISTER AND MINISTERS WOULD APPEAR IN THE ASSEMBLY AND WOULD ANSWER QUESTIONS. A SPEAKER WOULD BE CHOSEN BY THE GOVERNMENT. MEMBERS WOULD BE APPOINTED FOR TWO YEAR TERMS, AT LEAST ACCORDING TO SHARAF'S PRESENT THINKING.

5. COMMENT: JORDANIANS ARE MOVING FAST ON THIS IDEA PRODDED BY THE KING AND SHARAF. LATTER RECOGNIZES THAT THE LISTS OF POTENTIAL APPOINTEES MAY BE A LOT MORE CONTROVERSIAL HERE THAN THE LEGISLATION ITSELF. HE ALSO IS FRANK TO ADMIT THAT IT IS AN EXPERIMENT FROM WHICH JORDAN DOES NOT EXPECT TO ESCAPE WITHOUT MAKING SOME MISTAKES, BUT HE BELIEVES THE RISKS ARE VERY MUCH WORTH MAKING THE EFFORT. THIS IS A RATHER DRAMATIC DEPARTURE FROM JORDAN'S PRESENT CLOSED GOVERNMENT BY THE KING AND A FEW ADVISORS AND SHOULD INCREASE LOCAL INTEREST IN DOMESTIC POLITICS AND PERHAPS BEGIN A REVIVAL AS WELL OF INTEREST IN PARTIES AND PRESSURE GROUPS. TRADITIONALLY HUSSEIN HAS DISTRUSTED LOCAL POLITICAL LEADERS

AND THEIR FOLLOWERS SINCE THE PERIOD IN THE 1950'S WHEN A
GOOD DEAL OF THEIR ENERGIES WERE EXPENDED ON TRYING TO CHANGE
THE LOCAL REGIME OF THE HASHEMITES OR ALTERNATIVELY IN TRYING
TO INTRODUCE SYSTEMS, IDEOLOGIES, AND IDEAS FROM NEIGHBORING
ARAB STATES AND FARTHER AFIELD. WHETHER JORDAN'S FRAGILE
POLITICAL STRUCTURE CAN STAND THE NEW STRESSES ADDED BY THIS
EXPERIMENT IS HARD TO PREDICT; BUT THE GRADUALIST
APPROACH SHOULD HELP. WHETHER TOO A SYSTEM
USED TO MORE AUTHORITARIAN PROCEDURES CAN
FLEX WITH THIS NEW APPROACH WILL BE CRUCIAL.
PICKERING

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Message Attributes

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Draft Date: 12 apr 1978
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